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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: VOTER REGISTRATION IN KWARA STATE

REF: ABUJA 3153

Classified By: Political Counselor Russ Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (SBU) Poloff visited Kwara State and met with INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner Ayo Adakeji on November 28 to discuss elections preparations in the state. Adakeji reported 59 voter registration machines (up from 44 as of November 26) to cover the 1,872 registration centers in the state, with each machine rotating on a four-day schedule. He indicated he expected to receive more than 400 machines before the exercise is completed and polling can take place. He reported technical problems with some of the machines, though he maintained repairs are done in Abuja in 1-2 days and the machines returned to the field.

¶2. (SBU) Adakeji reported only 60,463 people registered in Kwara State as of November 26, though more than 1.03 million voters were registered in Kwara in 2003. He told Poloff he expected an extension of voter registration to February, though he told Poloff he had not heard anything from INEC headquarters and was basing this assumption on news reports. (Note: The extension was announced shortly after Poloff's meeting.) Adakeji reported that the Kwara State INEC uses radio and television programming to inform the public of rotating registration machines. Adakeji told Poloff that the State INEC is not at present making plans nor conducting training in preparation for the April elections. Rather, they will begin to prepare for elections after registration is complete.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: A couple of observations from the visit:
-- Although Adakeji maintained that registration machines would rotate every 4 days to achieve the necessary coverage, Post notes that even with all 59 machines in working order each would have to cover 31 polling stations. At four days each it would take no less than 124 work days or more than five months to cover all 1,872 polling stations.

-- There were no computers in the offices visited by Poloff (including Adakeji's office, the office of Adakeji's Administrative Secretary and the receptionist -- by appearances about a third of the building). Remarkably, Adakeji claims he and his Administrative Secretary often do repairs on the voter registration computers to avoid the delay of sending them to Abuja.

-- The facilities and equipment at the State INEC office were in poor condition. Adakeji's receptionist told Poloff their landline phones have not worked for several months and they rely on cellular phones. Poloff observed several INEC vehicles at the State Headquarters: six pickup trucks with

cabs (two on blocks with no tires), eight trucks (four on blocks without tires) and one four-wheel drive vehicle.

-- Adakeji was guarded and suspicious of U.S. interest in the registration process. It took a letter from INEC Headquarters in Abuja, numerous phone calls and finally a personal visit to speak to his Administrative Secretary for him to finally agree to meet.

14. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. Poloff's findings are in line with what we have observed in Abuja as well as Enugu (reftel). It is clear that registration in Kwara State cannot be accomplished under the present conditions even by the extended February 14 deadline. Adakeji's expectation of more than 400 machines is a pipe dream and Post believes he is aware of the fatal flaws to the INEC plan, hence his weariness to meet. END COMMENT.
CAMPBELL